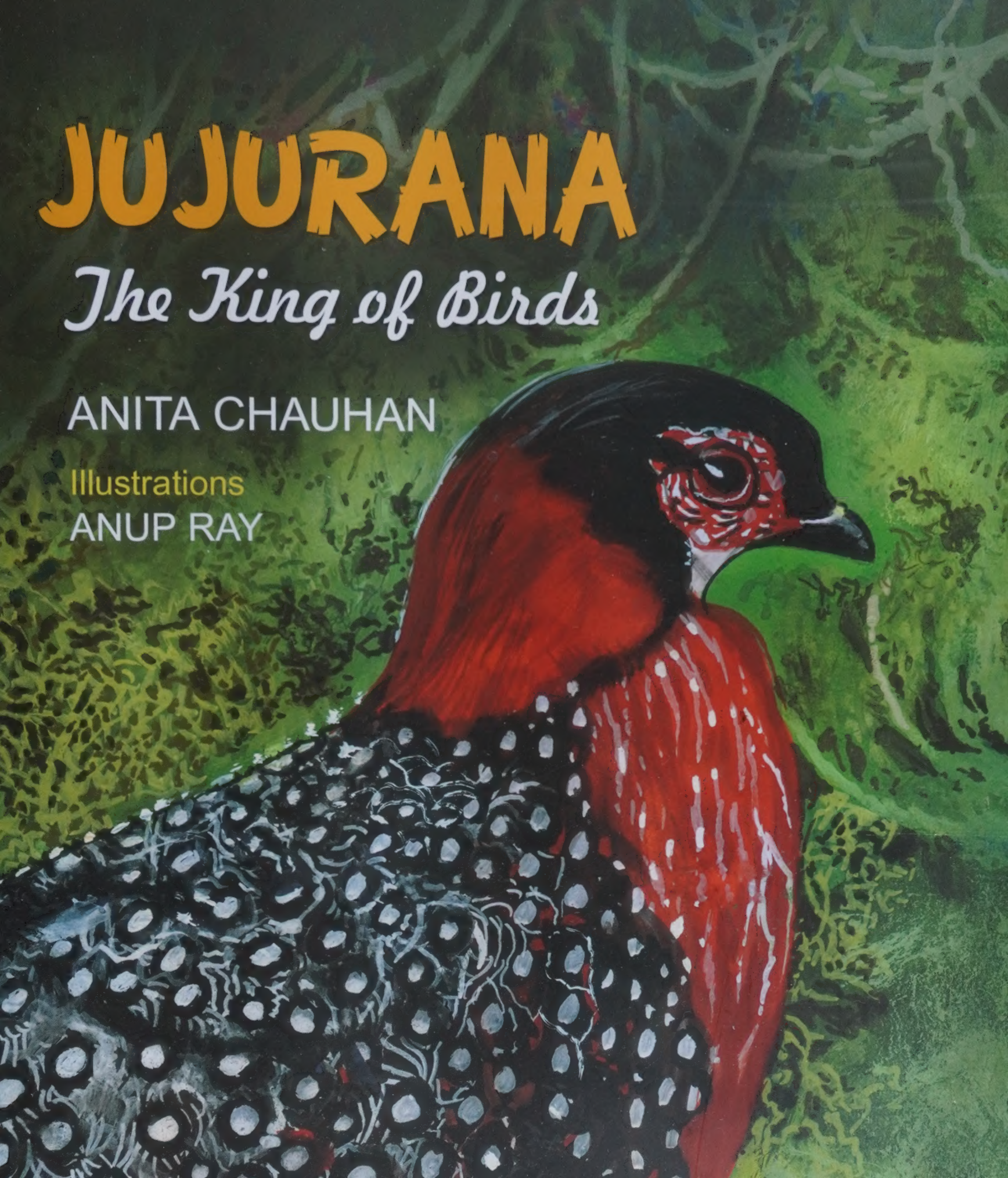
JUJURANA

The King of Birds

ANITA CHAUHAN

Illustrations
ANUP RAY



For children of the age group 10 to 12 years

The National Book Trust, India is an autonomous body established by the Government of India (Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education) in the year 1957, to promote books and reading. The biggest multilingual publisher of books for children in India, the Trust brings out colourful and well illustrated books for various age groups in 50 Indian languages and English with the intention of providing books to children in their own mother-tongue. All books for children and young adults are published under the series *Nehru Bal Pustakalaya*.

ISBN 978-81-237-8169-3

First Edition 2018
Reprints 2021 (twice), 2023 (*Saka* 1944)

© Anita Chauhan

₹ 120.00

Published by the Director, National Book Trust, India
Nehru Bhawan, 5 Institutional Area, Phase-II
Vasant Kunj, New Delhi-110 070

Website: www.nbtindia.gov.in

Nehru Bal Pustakalaya

JUJURANA

The King of Birds

ANITA CHAUHAN

Illustrations
ANUP RAY

nbt.india
एकः सूते सकलम्
NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, INDIA

"Hurry up mummy, we can eat on the way!" Vikram called out to his mother who was preparing breakfast in the kitchen.

"We will be out soon, please have your breakfast," said his sister who was helping her mother in the kitchen.

Twelve year old Vikram is excited because he, along with his fifteen year old sister, Kavita, and parents are going to the Himalayan Nature Park in Kufri. It will be a 30 minute journey from their home in Shimla.

Vikram has heard that the Park has big Himalayan black bears and the snow leopards which he has never seen before.

"Daddy, I am going to write an article on this visit," said Vikram as he settled in the front seat of the car next to his father, "please tell me more about the wildlife we are going to see."

"Yes," said his father, "we will learn a lot after seeing the Himalayan wildlife."

"You see, the Himalayan mountains stretch from the north to the north eastern states of India. Many species of animals and birds that live in the Himalayas are not found in the jungles of the plains," said father.

"What kind of animals are found in our state?" asked Vikram.

"Himachal Pradesh, as well as the states of Jammu & Kashmir and Uttarakhand in northern India, are home to black bears, snow leopards, wild sheep known as blue sheep, wild goats known as ibex and markhor, musk deer, barking deer, and many other animals and birds," his father answered.

"Are they all found in the conifer forests?" asked Vikram.

"The Himalayan ecosystem has foothill forests up to 1100 meters altitude, consisting of thorny vegetation and chir pine trees. In the higher of Greater Himalaya mountains, between 1500 and 3000 meters, mixed temperate forests, streams and meadows,

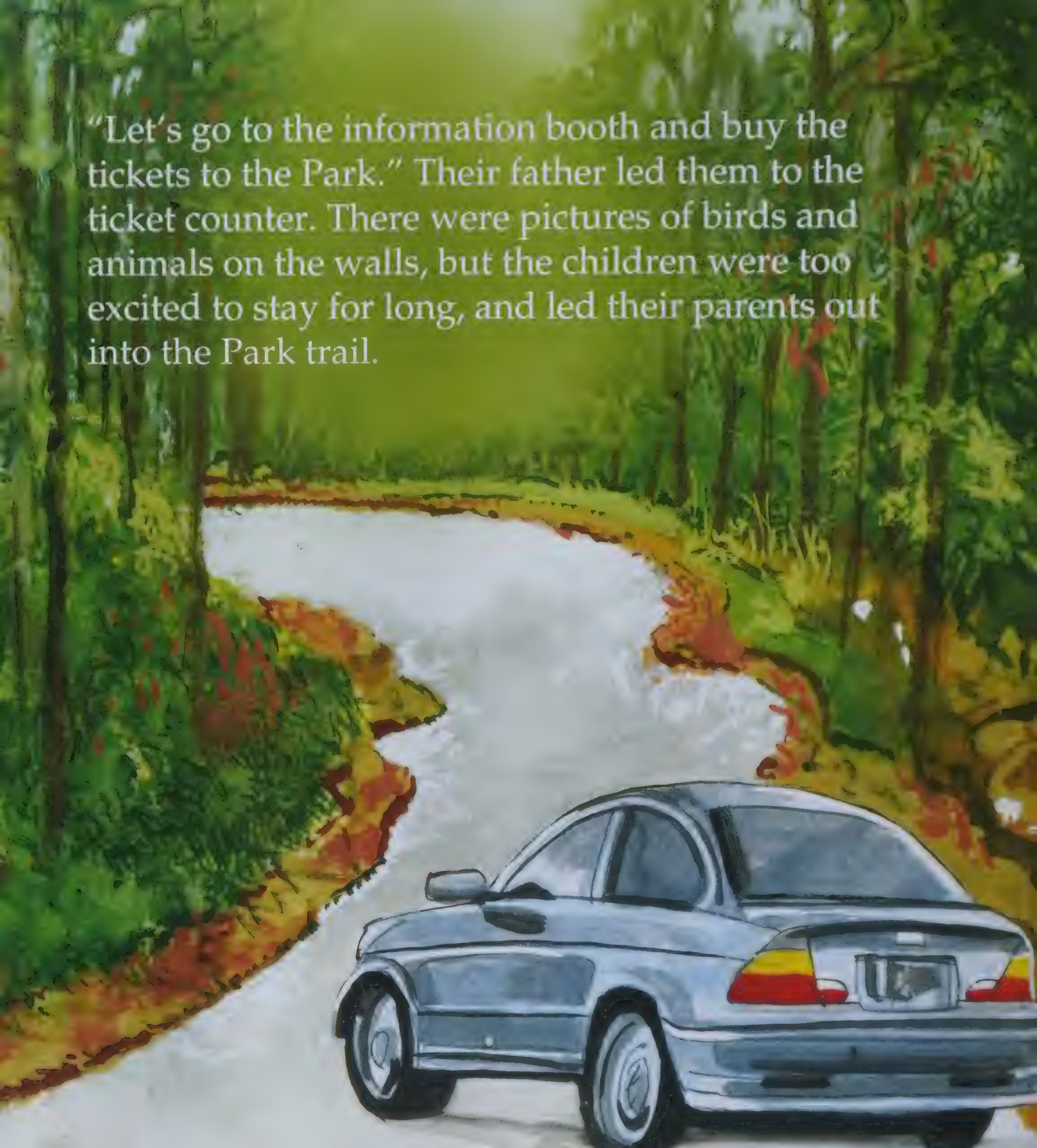
containing oak, devdar, rai, and rhododendron trees are found. In the rain-shadow area beyond the Greater Himalayas, forests are absent, and a high-altitude grassland landscape is found, with mountains and snow-fed rivers. Black bear and deer are found in and around these forests.

The wild sheep and goats mostly live in the rocky grasslands along with the snow leopards," said his father.

"So the different types of habitats contain different species of animals are adapted to their particular surroundings," Kavita said it loudly.

"Yes, they are all adapted to live in cold conditions. Some of them migrate to lower altitudes during the winters in search of food," her mother added.

"Ah, look! We are at the gate! Daddy, let's look at this signboard with pictures of animals. Kavita didi, take a picture with your camera!" Vikram pointed towards the pictures of bear and snow leopard.



"Let's go to the information booth and buy the tickets to the Park." Their father led them to the ticket counter. There were pictures of birds and animals on the walls, but the children were too excited to stay for long, and led their parents out into the Park trail.

HIMALAYAN NATURE PARK, KUFR

One by one, they came across the enclosures of barking deer, Tibetan wolf, goral, black bear, brown bear, and snow leopard.

"Daddy, look! That looks like a huge bird-cage!" Vikram called out.

"That is a 'pheasantry', an enclosure that houses the ground-dwelling birds called pheasants. Come, we will see them one by one. Try to keep your voice low as the birds do not like noises," father instructed.

The round pheasantry was divided into several small enclosures, each containing a beautiful species of bird. Their father pointed out the different birds to them—monal pheasant, kaleej pheasant, koklass pheasant, red junglefowl, cheer pheasant, and the western tragopan. Vikram was awestruck on seeing the bright and iridescent colours of the birds.

"Daddy, who are pheasants? He asked.
"Pheasants are a group of birds that have 50 different kinds or 'species'. Most of the pheasant species are found in the forests of Asia, spreading across Afghanistan to Malaysia and Borneo. India has 17 pheasant species. The peacock is also a pheasant," father replied.

Wow! This bird looks like a really colourful chicken," Vikram pointed out. "This is the red junglefowl, a type of pheasant which is believed to be the progenitor of the domestic chicken.

People in the ancient civilisations domesticated this species, and it is now found all over the world as the domestic chicken," said father.

Vikram looked intently at another bird. It had bright crimson colour around its neck, and silvery white spots on its black abdomen feathers. "Daddy, have you ever seen such a beautiful bird?"

"That, my dear boy, is the western tragopan, the State Bird of Himachal Pradesh. It is a rare species. Because of cutting down of the coniferous trees for timber, and other disturbances in its habitat, only about 5000 of them are left in the western Himalayas. There are 5 different species of tragopans found in Asia, and India has 4 of these which live in the western and the eastern Himalayas," said father.

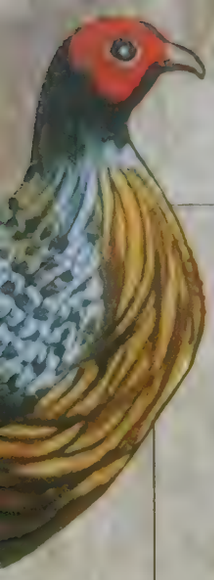
"Where does the western tragopan live, and how did it get its name?"
asked Vikram.

"The western tragopan is found in the states of Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. 'Tragus' means 'goat' in Greek language, and 'Pan' is the name of a god of shepherds and flocks that is worshipped in ancient Greece.

The bird is so called because its call sounds like that of a goat. It has two fleshy 'horns' about 3 inches in length on its head that are visible only during its courtship display dance," said father.

"A bird with horns!" exclaimed Kavitạ, clicking pictures with much excitement. "Where does this bird live? Does it eat snakes like peacocks do?" she asked.

"Ha ha!" her father laughed. "No, it does not eat snakes.



In fact, it is mostly a vegetarian, eating insects only during its growing-up phase as a chick. Tragopans eat berries, fruit, flower petals and young bamboo shoots that are rich in minerals, sugar and vitamins. We should learn from it and eat a healthy diet."

"I am feeling hungry now," said Vikram. "Let's go back to the car and have lunch."

So, they went to the car parked outside the boundary of the Nature Park and had sandwiches made by mother. Their father bought fruit-juices for everyone from the tea-stall.

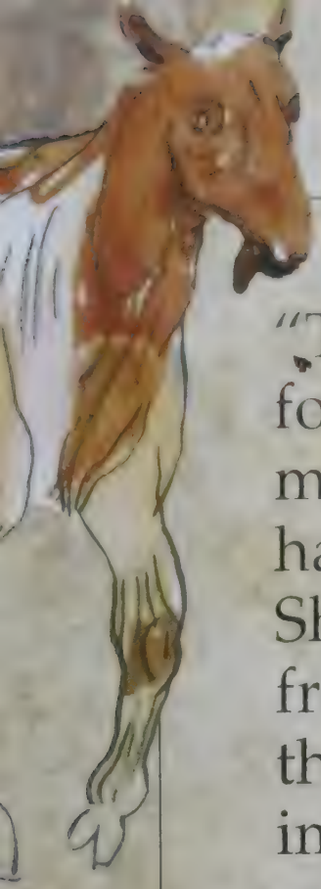
"Western tragopans live in the mixed temperate forests, along with other birds and animals of this zone. They usually roost on trees at night, and feed on the ground during morning and evening. They are

usually found near the forest streams. The female tragopan is not as brightly coloured, and its plumage blends with the dry leaves in the forest. They are usually found in pairs. They make their nests on trees during their breeding season in April." Said father while sipping juice.

"The local people call this bird 'Jujurana', which means 'King of Birds'. The forests where the tragopans live are rich in natural resources like bamboo, medicinal plants, and a rare highly prized mushroom called Guchhi or morel. Villagers living in the vicinity of the forests go to the forest during the spring to collect these plants. The dried medicinal plants are also highly prized in the market."

"Unfortunately, over-harvesting of these plants is not only making the plants rarer, it also disturbs the nesting tragopans during the breeding season.

During spring, when there is fresh growth of grasses and herbs, herds of goats and sheep also go to the forests and meadows of higher altitude, disturbing the tragopans in their habitat."



"The government is now providing facilities for the villagers to cultivate and sell the medicinal plants so that they do not over-harvest the plants from the forest. Shepherds have to obtain permits from the Forest Department for grazing their livestock, and they also have to immunize the herds against diseases, so that spread of diseases to wild animals, and overgrazing of the pastures, can be prevented." Father added.

"In 1984, a large portion of the mixed temperate forest habitat of the western tragopan in Himachal Pradesh was declared a national park---The Great Himalayan National Park.

Since human interference is prohibited in the core area of the park, the western tragopan has found a relatively safe refuge

in it, and its population is showing an improvement," father explained.

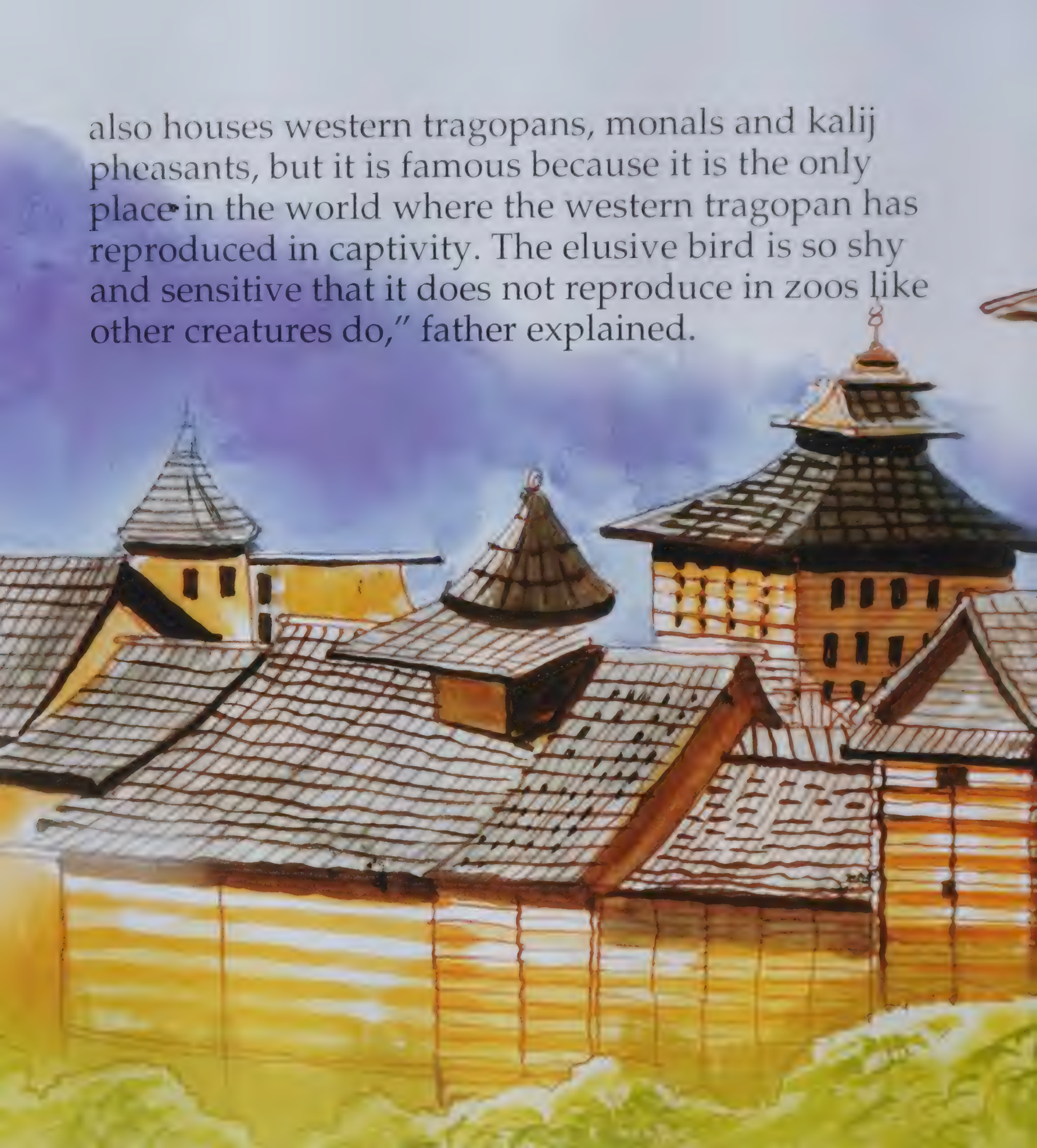
"How many tragopans are there in the forest?" asked Kavita.

"Scientists from a conservation organisation called the Wildlife Trust of India, along with the State Forest Department conduct surveys every year in the spring season.

The tragopans are so elusive and well-camouflaged that the scientists have to rely on the sounds of the bird's call or its fallen feathers to estimate its population. The forest is divided into survey areas or 'grids', the number of calls is noted in each grid, and is then added up," father answered.

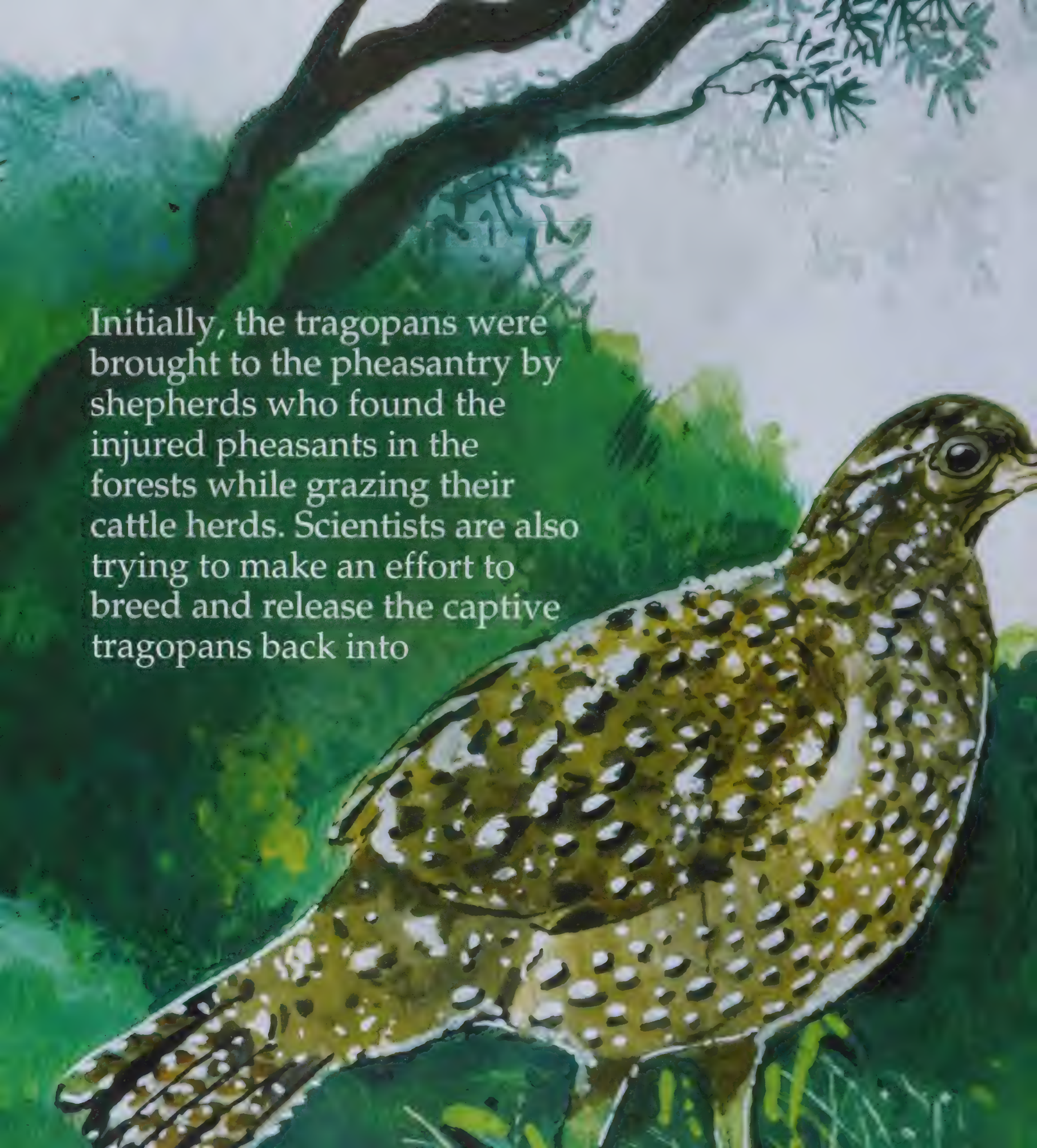
"There is a world famous pheasantry in a town called Sarahan Bushahr, about 100 kilometres from Shimla. That pheasantry

also houses western tragopans, monals and kalij pheasants, but it is famous because it is the only place in the world where the western tragopan has reproduced in captivity. The elusive bird is so shy and sensitive that it does not reproduce in zoos like other creatures do," father explained.



"I remember going to Sarahan Bushahr when Kavita was very young. We had visited the magnificent Bhimra Kali temple there. Since the temple is located close to the pheasantry, we walked up to it to see the pheasants. The caretaker at the pheasantry said that

that the success of the Sarahan pheasantry might be the climate of the area, as the pheasantry is located near the Daranghati Sanctuary—a Himalayan forest habitat where the pheasants occur naturally.



Initially, the tragopans were brought to the pheasantry by shepherds who found the injured pheasants in the forests while grazing their cattle herds. Scientists are also trying to make an effort to breed and release the captive tragopans back into

the natural forest habitat, but it is a difficult task and will take time," mother added.

The western tragopan is also an indicator of the health of the forest ecosystem as it feeds on a variety of plant species.If the tragopan is secure, our forests are secure.

Our wildlife is secure. Many tourists visit nature parks and National Parks to get a glimpse of the wildlife, and to enjoy the beautiful trekking trails in the Himalayas." Father concluded.

After an informative tour they all returned home.

"Wow! We have so many beautiful birds in our state. Some day, I will go for trekking in the Himalayas, and will see a pheasant in its natural habitat!" Vikram gushed.

"Where are you off to? Don't you have to write your article?" asked his sister.

"Yes, but first I am going to tell my friends about Jujurana— the King of Birds!" Vikram ran out speedily.

Printed at Nutech Print Services-India, Faridabad

Vikram and his sister Kavita are visiting the Kufri Nature Park near Shimla with their parents on a weekend. The Nature Park is home to many species of birds and mammals belonging to the Himalaya Mountain region. Would you like to see these species and find out more about them? Follow the siblings as they learn about the wildlife and discover *Jujurana*, a magnificent bird species found only in the mountains of northern India.

Anita Chauhan is a science writer and an independent researcher based in New Delhi. She is a member of the wildlife conservation NGO called World Pheasant Association India, and writes for its newsletter *Mor*. She writes to highlight conservation issues particularly in her home-state Himachal Pradesh, and has previously published a book and an article for the *Saevus* Magazine.

An accomplished artist, **Anup Ray**, is the Art Director with *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, a popular daily newspaper published in Bangla from Kolkata. He also has a string of children's books to his credit, including many fascinating books for the National Book Trust, India.

nbt.india
एकः सूते सकलम्
NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, INDIA

₹ 120.00
ISBN 8123781697-5
9 788123 781693
22231942